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DURHAM, N.H. -- University of New Hampshire students will lend a hand to the community this tax season and help those in need make sure they file their returns correctly.

The six students, all business majors with UNH's Whittemore School of Business and Economics, have become certified tax preparers with UNH's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA), which is a collaboration between the university and the Internal Revenue Service.

The VITA Program offers free tax help to low-income (under \$35,000) people who need help preparing their tax returns. The UNH students providing the help are graduates and undergraduates who are IRS VITA-certified to help prepare basic tax returns.

“This program allows our students to help their community and gain practical experience in tax preparation,” said William Knowles, a UNH finance and accounting instructor who volunteered to teach the certification class to the student volunteers. “We have an extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic group of student volunteers who will have an advantage entering accounting firms because of the work they will perform in the program.”

The program was started by Michael Eckert, a UNH alum, who used the VITA program to fill out his tax forms when he was a student at the University of Maine-Orono. It is managed by Paul Sicard, a graduate student in accounting.

“In addition to community members and senior citizens, many international students use this service because although they work in the United States, they do not understand how to file their tax returns,” Eckert said.

VITA volunteers are available for free tax return preparation assistance to the UNH and greater Durham communities at the Memorial Union Building (MUB) every week until April 15 on Mondays, 6 to 9 p.m., and Fridays, 1 to 5 p.m. Room locations will change each week, so those seeking assistance should check with MUB information desk regarding the location of the VITA program volunteers.

Volunteers will be available. It is open to all who need help.